R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 020 054 RC 002 492

THE CASE FOR CHANGE--IN THE FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT.

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PUB DATE 2 OCT 61

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.32 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION, *CONSULTATION PROGRAMS, COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEMS, *COORDINATION, *EDUCATIONAL COORDINATION, EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, *INTERMEDIATE ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, POPULATION GROWTH, REGIONAL COOPERATION, REGIONAL PROGRAMS, RURAL EDUCATION, SCHOOL REDISTRICTING, *SERVICES, LOS ANGELES COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM,

THE INTERMEDIATE OR COUNTY AREA OF EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY PROVIDES DIRECT SERVICES TO SMALL LOCAL DISTRICTS AND CONSULTATIVE SERVICES TO LARGER DISTRICTS, WHILE PERFORMING REPORTING FUNCTIONS TO STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION. SINCE GROWTH IN POPULATION AND DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION AND REORGANIZATION ARE GREATLY REDUCING THE NEED FOR DIRECT SERVICES TO LOCAL DISTRICTS, THE EXISTENCE OF COUNTY OR REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENTS WILL DEPEND ON THEIR ADAPTABILITY TO THE INCREASING NEED FOR CONSULTATIVE SERVICES AND COORDINATION BETWEEN LOCAL DISTRICTS. SETTING HIGH CERTIFICATION STANDARDS, PROVIDING ADEQUATE STATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT, APPOINTING RATHER THAN ELECTING INTERMEDIATE UNIT SUPERINTENDENTS, AND REORGANIZING THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT UNDER A REGIONAL CONCEPT ARE REQUIREMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGE IN EMPHASIS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF COUNTY AND RURAL AREA SUPERINTENDENTS (16TH, PITTSBURGH, OCTOBER 1-3, 1961). (JEH)

RECEIVED
JUN 24 1968
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ED020054

For Release on Delivery: 9:30 A.M., Monday, October 2, 1961

Sixteenth Annual National Conference
COUNTY AND RURAL AREA SUPERINTENDENTS
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
October 1-3, 1961

SPEAKER: C. C. TRILLINGHAM, Superintendent, Los Angeles County Schools, Los Angeles, California

Topic: "THE CASE FOR CHANGE--IN THE FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT"

Place: Ballroom 1

Four years ago it was my privilege to speak to this group when it met in Denver My topic was "The County Superintendent's Role in Facing the Realities of Change."

Because many of you were not present then, and to serve as a philosophical base for my remarks today, I would like to repeat a few paragraphs from that speech.

"In most of our states, there are three levels or areas of educational responsibility--the State Department of Education, the County Superintendents' office, and the local school district. Properly organized, these three agencies share responsibility and hold partnership status. Each has its own unique functions to perform. In general, the State Department of Education is a policy-making and leadership body; the local school district is the operating unit; the county or intermediate unit is the coordinating and service agency."

"The intermediate unit thus serves as a service agency to local school districts in improving their educational programs and assisting in the professional growth of personnel, and to the State Departments of Education in handling the legally required housekeeping functions in such matters as annual reports, certification, retirement and the like. In performing these latter functions which are exceedingly important although somewhat removed from classroom instruction, the intermediate unit is actually serving as an arm of the state."

"Our job is to serve the school districts, not to run them. Our role is to strengthen and supplement, not compete with or supplant the program of the local district. We recognize that the center of gravity in the county or intermediate area

RC 003492

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> is not in our offices but in the districts where the teachers work directly with children and youth."
>
> "In the words of former Commissioner Lawrence Derthick, we attempt to provide leadership without domination and assistance without interference. We realize that our services won't be effective unless they are wanted and they won't be wanted unless they are of high quality."

My last paragraph from that statement of four years ago is as follows:

> "I'm going to prophesy that in the next 25 years one of the great developments in American education will be the emergence of the intermediate unit as a resource agency to make available coordination and consultative services to <u>all</u> districts in the county or area, as well as the usual direct services to the smaller districts."

In some of the states, I see that prophecy coming into some degree of fulfillment.

In regard to the functions of the intermediate unit, the direct services have long been regarded as necessary for those districts that are small, remote, or low in resources. These include supervision of instruction, curriculum improvement, health, guidance, attendance, business, and special education services.

Likewise, the operation of educational programs in juvenile halls and probation camps, and for the physically handicapped and mentally retarded might be regarded as types of direct service.

It is likely that direct services must continue to be provided smaller school districts which, because of the size or location or absence of proper district organization cannot provide for themselves without excessive costs.

However the continued programs of district consolidation and reorganization; and the usual and substantial growth in population and school enrollments in many parts of the country are shifting the emphasis from <u>direct service</u> to <u>coordination</u> as the major function of the intermediate unit. These two factors, plus the provision of additional state funds for the operation of service programs by intermediate offices, such as in California, have tended to dimish the district need for direct services, while at the same time necessitating more

coordination services of all kinds for all districts regardless of size.

Thus, it is inevitable that as districts become larger and stronger as the result of growth and reorganization, the need for direct services from the intermediate unit will gradually decline.

As districts add their own supervisory personnel and related services, there will be less need for intermediate unit staff to work directly with individual teachers. Our personnel will tend to work more and more with district leadership -- superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of curriculum and instruction, supervisors, consultants and principals. Our job will increasingly become that of working with district leadership in evaluating programs, assessing needs, determining strengths and weaknesses, establishing priorities, and planning improvements. This will require increasingly top level competence on the part of the intermediate unit staff. Coordination thus becomes our most significant function.

Dean Irving Malbo of the University of Southern California School of Education, challenges the emerging intermediate unit to become a power of cooperative research, a center for innovations, local planning and quality control of education. He suggests that we use teams of specialists as an approach to the solution of our major problems. It is entirely possible that the professional staff of the intermediate unit might be reduced in number. However, its members must be unsurpassed in quality and operate at higher levels of professional service as they serve more adequate district units. It might well be concluded that a high level program of coordination for assisting all districts in solving their problems and improving their educational programs is the highest expression of educational leadership and service.

Whether or not we county superintendents fulfill our ultimate promise and destiny will depend upon our willingness to face up to change that appears to be inevitable. Some tell us that when school districts become properly organized, the office of the County Superintendent of Schools will go the way of the dinosaur. Some county superintendents seem to fear this prediction. Unless we can get a new vision of a new and more significant role, the office could and perhaps should pass into historical oblivion.

Before closing my remarks, it might be helpful if I would give a few examples of what I regard as high level coordination.

Forgive me for mentioning my own staff and program in Los Angeles County, but I am more familiar with them. We have left only 16 small districts in Los Angeles County that receive the usual direct services. We are almost out of that business. However, we have 84 larger districts that participate in a considerable variety of coordination activities.

May I mention just a few of these:

FIRST: A fitness project involves all our school districts. More than 300 persons have worked thru 13 work groups under the direction of our health and physical education staff. Attention has been given on how to upgrade various phases of the health and fitness programs and guides have been developed for district use.

SECOND: A committee representing the 15 largest districts tackled the problem of what to do with the 15, 16 and 17 year-olds who are not interested in school and who tend to disrupt classes. Codes of conduct and strengthened district policies have resulted, as well as improved curriculum offerings.

THIRD: We are in the 12th year of a child and youth study project in growth and development. Last year, 71 study groups of teachers and administrators met for two hours every other week. Consultants came several times a year from the University of Maryland.

FOURTH: Eighty school districts and our County Office are not participating in what we call Our American Heritage project. Four work committees are working on the evaluation of materials, inservice programs for teachers, the strengthening of curriculum offerings, and board policies, and public relations.

The focus is on teaching better than ever before what we believe in and stand for in this country as well as becoming alerted to the dangers that threaten our way of life.

FIFTH: Sixty school districts in four counties are co-operating in an extensive program of television instruction. As only one example, last year 1100 class groups took conversational Spanish with a master teacher over educational television.

These are examples taken from a recent compilation of more than fifty such cooperative projects for which our intermediate staff provides direction and coordination. These are illustrative of coordination activities carried on by the county offices in California, thanks to state financial support and enabling legislation.

To meet the challenge of the changing role of the intermediate unit in American education as I have described it, it will be necessary to meet certain conditions. Let me review some of these.

1. Certification standards for the superintendent of the intermediate unit and for his professional staff should be at least as high as those for other members of the profession.

2. There should be legal provision for adequate state financial support for the intermediate service program. This should serve two purposes -- that of making the office less dependent upon other political agencies, and providing for some financial equalization between intermediate units.

3. Instead of running for office on a political basis, the intermediate unit superintendent should be appointed to office by an elective lay board and should serve as its executive officer. The board should determine the superintendents' salary.

4. In many instances, the intermediate unit should be reorganized in terms of a regional concept rather than around the present county geographic concept. As a matter of economic necessity, it is possible that a half-dozen or more counties may need to be grouped together to provide proper audio-visual aids or psychological services, for example, to their school districts. Several states are now making headway in this direction. It will take a lot of courage to face the change from the historical pattern of county organization but our greatest potential for service probably cannot be realized without some reorganization at the intermediate as well as at the district level.

5. The Intermediate unit will always include but must go on beyond the strictly rural concept. We must always champion the cause of the small, the financially inadequate, and the isolated school district if we are to achieve our goal of equal educational opportunity to all,

but with continued growth and reorganization, an increasing number of thriving service programs are found in predominantly metropolitan areas and they are serving all school districts, large and small. Rural education will always be of great importance and should be everybody's concern. However, the service program today properly embraces the whole county or intermediate area.

Facing up to change in meeting these requirements and needs will be the ultimate test of our professional maturity. I have every confidence that as individual educators and as a national organization, the county and rural area superintendents of the United States will meet this challenge

Presented by:

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS AT THE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF COUNTY AND RURAL AREA SUPERINTENDENTS

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

October 2, 1961